

Remarks of Mark Bisnow
Senior Vice President
webMethods, Inc.

House Committee on Government Reform
May 8, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear this morning on behalf of webMethods, one of America's leading makers of integration software. My name is Mark Bisnow, and yes, I am the one who does the corny radio commercials for webMethods, where I run our government operations unit.

We like to think there's a method to my madness as I make fun of acronyms and technobabble on the public airwaves. We've reached a moment in American history where for the first time the word "integration"—though that's still too arcane a term to use in normal conversation—can at least be understood in concept...if you remove strange words like "back end," "enterprise class," and "scalability."

When I remind people that the 9/11 terrorists went up to the counters at United and American, used their real names, but weren't recognized even though they were on government watch lists, a light bulb goes off and they realize the importance of integrating databases. Or when I ask people if they've ever called their bank, and the voice menu says to punch in your account number, and you do so, and then you're transferred, and a human being answers, and they ask you for your account number again, and you say, "Didn't I just give you that?" And the person at the other end says, "Oh, that's another system in our company, and they're not connected." Well, let me put it this way: even my mom now understands what we do at webMethods.

Someday our grandchildren will think it's all very funny that computer systems didn't talk to each other; in fact, they probably just won't believe it. But at the moment, they don't talk to each other, and it's actually not very funny.

Nowhere is the imperative for integration clearer than in homeland security. Not just the mission of stopping terrorists, but how about just getting the daily functions of the department to work and hum? I've been around town a long time and when you talk about merging 170,000 people and 22 agencies, you are talking about a lot of BHAS's—that's the acronym for Big Hairy Accounting Systems, not to mention big hairy financial management systems, human resource systems, and the like.

Of course, it just so happens that's WebMethods' bread and butter. We are a company of nearly 1000 people, based in Fairfax, with 50 offices in 18 countries throughout the world. If you'll forgive the commercial, we are generally considered one of the three

leading makers of integration software. Commercial, off the shelf software that is cheaper, faster, more reliable, and more secure than the old fashioned way of hiring lots of human beings to write software code to connect different systems. Instead, we provide a nice neat software platform that all the different systems and databases plug into.

We do this for Fed Ex, Dell, 3M, Office Depot, Apple, Verizon, Best Buy, Freddie Mac, the Army, NSA, EPA, and about 1000 other household name companies and government organizations. For Bank of America, we are the standard integration platform for their retail banking arm, all their ATMs, branch tellers, web access, and every voice response you get when you call them. For Motorola, we connect all their countless facilities all around the planet. So the commercial world knows us well.

But how does a relatively small company like ours, with a great product, get into a big agency like DHS? Well, I wish it were like getting to Carnegie Hall and all it takes is practice, but nope, that's not enough. If it were a matter of vast world-class experience, they would be ringing our phone off the hook.

The fact is, it's not easy, and here's some reasons why:

First, those wonderful people at DHS have a million other things to do. Thank heavens they don't stop every moment to listen to every pleader. But we'd like to think that integration is about as high a priority as you can get, so I keep hoping that when I check voice mail they'll be an urgent message waiting from Steve Cooper.

Second, relatively small companies like ours are creatures of big companies. We are little pipsqueaks in the scheme of things, and tend to sell through the big prime contractors. Have I forgotten to mention how wonderful the companies are at this table?

Third, the government is a bit of an IBM shop, as they say. Even though top analysts may tell you our software is hands down better in this particular niche, never underestimate the bureaucratic appeal of the deniability you get if there's ever a problem and you can say, "Hey, man, I bought IBM."

Fourth, there is still something called architecture being established, and of course you wouldn't start building a house and buying components without a blueprint.

Finally, there ain't a lot of money sloshing around—yet. That's where this fine Committee and Congress come in, so that's above my pay grade to comment.

But on the bright side, there are now some pilot programs, and we do hope to participate in those. We are lucky that, in general when our software is evaluated, people love it and we get contracts. If I had one thing to suggest to DHS, it would be that there should be more proactive evaluation of technology like ours. I suspect DHS agrees, and when the dust settles from the merger, there may be.

Mr. Chairman, integration is not just a subject for techies. It has huge implications for our economy, foreign policy, and homeland security. This committee will leave an extraordinary legacy if it gets Americans to understand the power for good that information-sharing, a/k/a integration, can have in our daily lives—making government run more efficiently, and helping to prevent terrorism.

The Department of Homeland Security is the best imaginable laboratory and showcase for this revolution, and as an integration company, we at webMethods are hoping that the example it sets will be a great one. We are deeply indebted to this Committee for trying to make that happen, and we stand ready to help.

Thank you again for your invitation.